

HOOKED NOW

DAVE SKIP RICK
HUGHES-MORRIS-HAFELE

WELCOME to the February-March issue of *HookedNow*.

Feel free to contact us if you have any questions or comments at: sweltsa@frontier.com
(include "HookedNow" in the subject line for quicker replies).

February begins a long series of insect hatches that excite both trout and fly fisher. With good hatches comes good surface feeding activity and the possibility of some great dry fly fishing. But it also brings the possibility of great frustration, since what appears to be trout taking dry flies often are trout taking emergers. What are emergers? What patterns match them? How should you fish them? All good questions, and we have tried to answer them in this issue of *HookedNow*. So, without any further blabbering, let the hatches begin!

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Photo by Rick Hafele



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RICK HAFELE – THE “WINK” UNDERWATER: EMERGER BEHAVIOR REVEALED

(All photos by Rick Hafele except where noted)

Photo by Dave Hughes



Sometimes it's helpful to go back a few generations of fly fishers and re-read what they knew about trout and trout fishing. When that urge hits me I almost always open one of my books by George Edward MacKenzie Skues (aka. G. E. M. Skues). A favorite of mine is, *The Way of a Trout with a Fly*, first published in 1921. I strongly encourage anyone serious about fly fishing for trout to read this book. Skues was a keen observer and critical thinker at a time when tradition ruled much of the methods of the day. As a result he was harshly ridiculed for his lack of proper protocol for - heaven forbid! - fishing flies below the surface. To Skues, however, nature provided a more useful model for success than tradition, so he resolutely pursued his experiments with different techniques and fly patterns, and describes them with his clear and entertaining prose.

So, how does Skues connect to the behavior of emerging insects you ask? Well, one of my favorite pieces Skues wrote is the poem, *Little Brown Wink*, part of which I copied below:

*Oh, thrilling the rise to the lure that is dry
When the shy fish comes up to his slaughter
Yet rather would I have
The turn to my fly,
With a cunning brown wink under water,
The bright little wink under water!
Mysterious wink under water!
Delightful to ply
The subaqueous fly,
And watch for the wink under water!*

That wonderful “wink” underwater is what this issue is all about. And just in case you are curious, the above poem continues for four pages, much too long to reprint here, but well worth a read if you get the chance.



What's Emergence?

It's probably best to start by defining emergence. In the context used here, emergence refers to the specific point in an insect's life cycle when it changes, i.e. emergers, from the final immature stage into a winged adult. For many aquatic insects, but certainly not all, this event occurs in the water's surface film, and frequently produces intense feeding on or near the surface by whatever fish are present. Another name applied to this moment by fly fishers is, *a hatch*. Thus, hatch and emergence, as used by fly fishers, mean exactly the same thing. So if an angler tells you he just fished a great blue-winged olive hatch, he means blue-winged olives were emerging into winged adults (actually winged duns in the case of mayflies, but we'll get to that in a moment). When it comes to fly fishing for trout, anglers want nothing more than to be on the water during a good hatch.



The moment of truth for most aquatic insects is when the winged adult escapes, or emerges, from the underwater nymphal or pupal stage. For many, like this blue-winged olive mayfly, "emergence" occurs in the surface film of stream or lake.

When?

To be on the water during a hatch, you have to know when a good hatch will occur. This requires both knowledge and a bit of luck. Most fly shops, for example, have hatch charts that list when major insects emerge on their local waters. And once the sequence of hatches is known, you can be reasonably sure that that sequence will be repeated year after year. However, to be on a stream or lake during peak hatch activity requires a little luck as well. That's because while the general timing of a hatch can be known, predicting how that insect will behave on any specific day is guesswork at best. Understanding why requires looking at insect physiology.

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Insects are cold-blooded animals, thus, water temperature plays a key role in how fast nymphs grow, and when exactly they will reach full size and be ready to emerge. That's why hatches occur later than normal in years with colder than usual winter and spring weather, or earlier than expected in years when winter and spring temperatures are above normal. But photoperiod - the hours of daylight - also plays a critical role in insect growth and development for some species. It's known for example, that when day length reaches a certain point it will cause a shift in growth hormones in some insects, causing the nymphs to stop getting bigger and to start producing adult tissue like wings. Without this shift in growth hormones, the juvenile insect never completes development into an adult.

Weather, and resulting water temperatures, has a major influence on when hatches occur. However, for many insects photoperiod also plays an important role. Together temperature and photoperiod interact in complex and often unknown ways to determine the timing of hatches.



The complex interaction between temperature and photoperiod together determines the seasonal timing of many insect hatches, and how they interact is completely unknown for all but a few species that have been carefully studied by entomologists. While long-term temperature patterns and photoperiod affect seasonal hatch periods, other factors determine if a hatch occurs on one day but not the next, or at 3:00pm versus 11:00am. This adds yet another layer of complexity to predicting hatches.

Temperature again plays the central role in determining hatch activity from one day to the next. However, weather also plays a big role, partly because weather directly influences water temperature. Water temperature in a river or lake changes several degrees from sunrise to sunset, and this changing temperature, even if it's just a small amount, will trigger a hatch to occur. The amount and timing of the temperature change will be determined by air temperature plus how much direct sunlight reaches the water.



On warm sunny days hatches tend to occur early or late in the day, while on cool and cloudy days hatches generally take place mid-morning to late afternoon. Don't be surprised however, when the unexpected happens, so always be on the lookout for insect activity.

On sunny days water temperature increases faster and reaches a higher maximum temperature than on cloudy days. For this reason hatches tend to occur earlier in the day and for a shorter period of time on a sunny day than on a cloudy one. Many insects also favor cloudy days for their emergence because the newly emerged adults are very susceptible to dehydration, which is less of a problem on cloudy days.

Overall, one can predict with a fair level of confidence the time of year a certain insect will emerge, though the exact timing will vary early or late depending on long-term weather conditions. Predicting the level of hatch activity on a given day during the emergence season for a specific insect, however, is still highly dependent on daily weather conditions and very hard to predict.

How & Where?

Understanding emergence behavior is the key to understanding what fly pattern to use, and where and how to fish it. Given the huge number of fly patterns that have been developed to imitate emerging insects, selecting the right pattern can be quite confusing.

A little knowledge of bug behavior, however, can simplify this dilemma. Of all the different groups of insects that live in streams and lakes, only three have behavior that creates selective surface feeding by trout during their emergence: mayflies, caddisflies, and chironomids or midges.

Mayflies

If I were a trout and wanted to design tasty, easy to catch meals, I'd create mayflies. Nearly all trout waters have an abundance of at least some mayfly species, and their behavior makes them the perfect targets for feeding trout. First, during a mayfly hatch, the nymphs of most species leave the stream or lake bottom and swim up to the surface, where the dun escapes from the nymph's exoskeleton and, if lucky, flies off the water. When the nymphs swim up to the surface, they are sitting ducks for trout looking for an easy meal. Thus, during the very early stages of a hatch, fishing a nymph pattern that matches the natural that's emerging can work wonders.

As more and more duns start emerging in the surface and flying off the water, surface feeding activity increases. This is when most people put on a dry fly to imitate the floating duns. While this seems like a reasonable idea, it can be a mistake. That's because more often than not trout are taking the nymphs hanging in the film, or duns in an intermediate stage of escaping the nymphal exoskeleton or shuck. It can be quite hard to tell what exactly the trout are eating, so watch the duns on the water and the trout's feeding carefully. If your dry fly drifts past feeding trout without interest, it's definitely time to put on an emerger pattern. A floating nymph pattern is a good place to start. If that doesn't work then try a pattern that represents a partially emerged dun. The Quigley cripple and Morris emerger are both excellent examples of these types of patterns. Soft hackles and flymphs work well for imitating duns that die crippled in the surface trying to emerge. Whichever emerger pattern you use, you should fish them with the same drag-free, dead-drift, presentation you use when fishing dries.

While not an emerger, the spinner stage is also very important to imitate after mayflies have mated and the females die on the surface after laying their eggs. Seeing

Winged Mayfly Stages?

Mayflies are unique among insects in having two winged stages: the dun, or subimago, and the spinner, or imago stage.

Duns can be recognized by their opaque, dusty colored wings, moderately long tails, and front legs of males similar in length as other legs.

Spinners have clear, transparent wings, long tails, and long front legs on males.

Once duns fly off the water they rest on nearby foliage for as little as 30 minutes, but more typically for 12 to 24 hours. After this brief rest they molt into the spinner stage. Spinners then mate, lay their eggs, and die.

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spinners on the water can be difficult, so make sure you look for them. Generally spinner falls occur several hours after the duns have emerged on the surface, but can also be on the water in the morning before a hatch begins.



During a hatch you may find trout feeding on nymphs below the surface (upper left), hanging in the film (upper center), or taking duns in the process of escaping the nymphal shuck (upper right). After a hatch, mayfly spinners (below) provide trout their last chance to feed on them and an excellent chance for anglers to imitate them.



Caddisflies and Chironomids

Caddis and midges have a slightly different approach when it comes to emerging into adults. Both of these groups progress from the larval stage (same as a nymph) to a pupa stage before becoming an adult. Thus, it's the pupal stage that swims from the stream or lake substrate up to the surface where the adults then escape the pupal shuck and fly away.

Caddis pupa develop inside the larval case or a rough shelter constructed by the larva. They typically remain inside the case or shelter for four to eight weeks, during



Caddis pupae remain hidden inside their pupal case (left) until mature, which can take four to eight weeks. Mature pupae (right) swim quickly to the surface during a hatch.

which time the pupa develops all the adult structures. Once the pupa is mature it cut's out of its case and swims vigorously to the surface. Therefore, if you happen to be fishing during a caddis hatch, trout are often feeding below the surface on rising pupae. This is the perfect time to tie on a flymph (see Dave's article on flymphs in this issue) or soft hackle of the appropriate size and color to match the swimming pupa. Given the variety of caddis species, determining the right size and color of fly pattern to use can be challenging. A fairly quick and simple method is to pick up a few soft ball sized rocks until you find one with a pupal case attached. Then, gently open the case to see what the pupa inside looks like.

The key to properly presenting caddis pupa patterns is matching their swimming behavior. A well known and often used method is the Leisenring Lift, developed by James Leisenring on the Broadheads in Pennsylvania in the 1940's. To accomplish a Leisenring Lift, cast up and across the current and allow your fly to sink close to the bottom. A weighted fly or split shot on the leader are generally needed to get deep enough. Allow the fly to dead-drift while sinking, then as the fly approaches in front of you stop your rod and slowly lift its tip inducing your fly to rise towards the surface. If you know the position of subsurface feeding trout, work your fly so it rises up



Soft hackles fished with a Leisenring lift often solve the mystery of how to catch trout during a caddis hatch.

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in front of the feeding fish. This rising motion usually is too much for a trout to take and results in a swift strike.

The other approach often used when caddis pupae are on the move is a wet-fly swing. Though similar to the Leisenring Lift, the wet-fly swing is made with a down-and-across cast, followed by an upstream mend. The fly is then left to drift downstream naturally or with slight twitches. Finally, as the fly reaches the lower end of the drift, the tightening line will cause it to swing up to the surface. Your fly won't sink as deep using the wet-fly swing, so it works best when trout are feeding relatively close to the surface.

Midge, or chironomid, pupae behave differently than caddis pupa. They rise slowly to the surface with an enticing wiggle, rather than the vigorous swimming action of caddis pupae. Therefore, a dead-drift presentation usually works best. Besides selecting a fly of the right size and color - there are literally hundreds of different midge species - it's critical to fish your midge pupa pattern at the right depth. Midge pupae often drift just inches above the stream or lake bottom before starting the rise to the surface. In lakes this drift period near the bottom can last one or two days before conditions trigger the hatch to begin. Such a massive concentration of pupa close to the lake bottom explains the popularity of fishing chironomid pupae suspended just above the lake's bottom on long leaders. Fishing midge pupa patterns at depth can solve many frustrating situations on both streams and lakes, but when it's clear fish are feeding on midges near or in the surface, try dead-drifting a midge pupa pattern in the surface film.



*Left: Chironomids collected from a trout using a throat pump.
Right: Just one example of a chironomid pupa pattern.*

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SKIP MORRIS – A SET OF EMERGER FLIES

(All photos by Skip Morris except where noted)

Photo by Carol Ann Morris



Any list of flies for any sort of fishing is bound to be subjective--there's no ultimate formula that can truly settle the matter, and a list-making fly fisher worth taking seriously comes with all sorts of unique experience that's bound to inform his or her choices. After considering this, I abandoned all effort to sidestep my biases--in fact, I came to count them among my most valuable resources here. But a sound list of flies must be well-rounded; in this case, it must cover the most common emerging insects upon which trout in rivers feed. And the flies must not only fill the slots the list logically creates, but fill them in a versatile and reliable way. So what follows are the results, experience, consideration, and biases included.

Those biases are the reason you'll see some of my own patterns--but after all, if I fish with and have come to trust a fly, shouldn't it be included whether or not it's my own design? I happily acknowledge that there are plenty of fine fly patterns out there beyond my own, however, and I included some of those as well.

AN INTRODUCTION TO EMERGER FLIES AND CRIPPLES

If you're new to the term "emerger," it means to fly fishers both an insect escaping its outer skin, its "shuck," and a fly that imitates an insect in this stage of its hatching. Wriggling from an obsolete skin is a particularly vulnerable stage for most insects that hatch on trout rivers, it's something like peeling off a wetsuit--consequently they can't swim and can't fly off, at least temporarily. "Cripples" are insects that failed in their hatching--they're not going anywhere, ever. (Flies imitating cripples are generally referred to as emergers too.) Trout know well the advantages of targeting emerging insects and cripples. That's one big reason the popularity of emerger flies has exploded over the past couple of decades--we fly fishers finally came to recognize what the trout knew all along.

MIDGE EMERGERS

Size is the only criteria that made any sense to me in deciding the order of the imitations. I had to start somewhere, so why not start at the small end? That would be the midge--about as tiny as a hatching insect can get and still interest trout.

When midges are squirming out of the water's surface in their typical abundance, a midge-pupa fly such as a Miracle Midge or Mercury Black Beauty (both simple, wormlike flies) dangled out there below a tippet smeared with floatant to within just an inch or two of the fly can be deadly. It's the ultimate in subtlety, and very cautious trout often fall for it. This is nearly, though not quite, true emerger fishing. But so what? It works.

However, midge-feeding trout are often focused not on the pupae down in the water but on the shuck-tangled emergers at the water's surface. When they are, it's hard to beat an old and extremely reliable pattern that even in midge-size 22 or 24 is easy for even fairly inexperienced fly tiers to handle at the vise: the Griffith's Gnat. A few turns of peacock herl, a few turns of hackle, done. Simple flies seem particularly effective when size gets down to 20 and smaller--that's true not only of midge imitations but imitations of tiny mayflies, the bitsy caddis fly fishers call "microcaddis," tiny flying ants, whatever.



The Griffith's Gnat, a simple fly that works.

The only way I've ever fished a Griffith's Gnat--and the only way that makes sense to me--is dead drift. Some fly fishers smear floatant only on the top of the fly help it settle partway through the surface of the water. That may seem fastidious to a fault, and may in fact be. I've taken up the habit myself though. Can't hurt.

Wouldn't hurt to throw some WD40s into your midge fly boxes too. The WD40 is a particularly plain and slender midge emerger that's taken very difficult trout for years on Colorado and New Mexico tail-waters.

Size? I carry midge-emerger patterns in size 20 to 24, with some 26s and even a few 28s. I told you midges were tiny...remember?

MAYFLY EMERGERS

The *Baetis* mayfly can run as tiny as an average midge; the *Hexagenia* mayfly is a yellow monster--but all mayflies share the same general form. This means that one fly pattern, varied by size and coloring, can potentially cover them all. There are a number of patterns that will do this.

Among the most popular and trusted mayfly-emerger imitations is the Quigley Cripple. Bob Quigley developed a whole line of variations on this fly to match about every western mayfly. Since some important western mayflies--the blue-winged olive, the Hex, the Trico...--are important across North America, and because you can tie it in any size and colors your mayflies require, the Quigley Cripple makes a solid choice from Maine to New Mexico and Washington to New Brunswick.

The Sparkle Dun--essentially a Compara-dun whose split tails are replaced with a tuft of reflective synthetic yarn as a shuck--also comes in a broad range of variations for matching a bunch of mayflies. The Sparkle Dun rides high for an emerger; that is, it rests on the water but doesn't project down below the mirrored surface to wave the trout on, signal them to begin their effortless ascent for an easy bite.

My Morris Emerger does poke down to signal the trout, and since it's really a hybridization of the Quigley Cripple and the Sparkle Dun this seems like the right time to introduce it. I took the Quigley's submerged, absorbent abdomen and burst-shuck hair butts, the Sparkle Dun's fanned-hair wing, and came up with a half-sunken emerger that stubbornly stays up. It too can take a big range of hook-sizes and colors to match all sorts of mayflies.



Three emerger patterns you should have in your fly box?

*Left: Quigley Cripple
Center: Morris Emerger
Right: Sparkle Dun*

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There are other choices, and if you haven't already you'll surely find some favorites for specific hatches. But if you pick one of the three styles above and carry it in versions to match the mayflies you find on your rivers...well, they've each got such an extensive record of success that if you fail to move trout during a hatch, don't blame the fly.

Mayflies range so widely in size and coloring and are distributed so regionally that the specifics of a selection of fly patterns gets tricky. When I lived in Oregon, for example, I always brought imitations of green drake mayflies to the Metolius River, but not much over an hour away was the Crooked River where I fished twenty or thirty times and never once saw a green drake. You probably need to do a little research on line or out of guide books or your local fly shop in deciding which specific mayfly-emerger imitations to collect. Or just go fish a lot and pay attention.



Photos by Carol Ann Morris

Another trout falls to an imitation of an emerging insect. Soon, he'll be gently returned to the river--to take another emerger-fly.



A mayfly that failed its hatching--a trout's delight.

CADDIS EMERGERS

Plump caddisfly pupae often pop right out of their shucks when they hit the surface of the water to hatch, and trout often take the pupae just under the surface or as they break through it. But some caddis do take their time, and there are always the cripples that drift helplessly in their failed emergence, so emerger flies for caddis make sense.

Truth is, there are times when the trout choose to take hatching caddis deep; I've seen it--adults swirling in mats in little eddies yet not a hungry nose showing and only a pupa pattern four feet down producing any action. Still, during most caddis hatches I've found trout up grabbing pupae about to hatch or in the process of hatching. (Never mind that fully hatched caddis adults, their shucks discarded and their wings free, have

occasionally seemed to attract the most attention from the trout--caddis emergers usually dominate in a caddis hatch, and anyway, this article is about emergers.)

The X Caddis is a sensible and fairly buoyant design of caddis-emerger fly. The deer-hair wing helps hold the fly afloat while the yarn shuck and the body rest on the water's surface or hang slightly below it. Just match the size and color of the natural and present the fly dead drift. Craig Mathews and his staff at the Blue Ribbon Flies fly shop have come up with several X Caddis variations for matching different caddisflies.

If you find the X Caddis to elemental for your tastes, perhaps an Overley's Spotlight Caddis? It's pretty flashy, with its parachute hackle, extended body, and wispy brush of speckled leg-fibers. Steve Overley's fly and the Blue Ribbon fly are both popular and proven. Take your pick.



X-Caddis (left) and Overley's Spotlight Caddis (right) are two good options when trout are taking caddis emergers.

COLOR ISSUES

Midges, mayflies, and caddis run a broad range of colors--sunny yellow, bright-green, all sorts of browns and grays, darkish orange, and more. You can--and to some degree probably will--collect flies of specific colors to match specific insects. But as a foundation, mayfly and caddis emergers in light and dark (I usually go with tan and medium brown), from size 20 through 10, can carry you a long way. Simply put, exact color is the *least* important factor in matching an insect with a fly. If you have a tan-bodied Morris Emerger with natural-light deer hair for the wing and burst shuck, tied in size 14, it'll almost

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certainly convince cagey trout during a hatch of size-14 pale morning duns or pale evening duns if fished well.

Midges? Yes, their colors vary as I said. But they must all look about the same when their spidery legs are spread or struggling from the shuck and their shucks still cling to their squirming bodies--trout seem to take tiny Griffith's Gnats consistently during *all* midge hatches. So I no longer worry...much...about insect or fly color when I choose emerger flies for midge hatches. And usually I still, after all these years, chose the Griffith's Gnat (and sometimes a standard olive-brown WD40).

THE WILD CARD: THE SOFT-HACKLED FLY

The soft-hackled fly goes way back--a little research in my personal library suggests it may go as back as far as the 1600s in some form or another. Seems like enough time for a fly design to sufficiently prove itself (understatement). The soft-hackle, and its close cousin the flymph, isn't normally fished on top of or even half-submerged in the water as are most emerger flies--it's fished just *under* the surface of the water. And to make the soft hackle even more anomalous among its emerger-fly kin, it's not fished dead drift but given a little action.

Photo by Carol Ann Morris



Typical soft-hackled-fly water: slow, smooth, and sprinkled with near-surface-feeding trout, and the simple but elegant soft-hackled fly (left) and flymph (right).

Mind you, a little action isn't entirely inappropriate for emerger flies in general on or in the surface. Until now I've been talking about fishing emergers dead drift, free with the current, but once in a while a tiny occasional twitch can be just the right strategy for a Morris Emerger or X Caddis, giving the fly that slight movement of an insect struggling from its shuck. That's different from the way you work a soft-hackle though--it swings

quietly across a light current, its hackle-fibers waving against the shifting flow and every mend of the fly line.

Soft-hackled flies are elemental yet quietly elegant in form. The key to their effectiveness, I believe, lies in their hackles, overlong and really supple, usually made from a partridge, hen, or starling feather. The most versatile of all standard soft-hackled-fly designs, in my experience, is the March Brown Spider. I carry it from size 18 to 14. Not a bad idea to carry a few other variations though, such as the Partridge and Yellow and the Partridge and Green.

AN EVEN WILDER CARD: THE ATTRACTOR EMERGER

Attractor flies have proven themselves to me--I couldn't possibly tell you how many times a goofy Chernobyl Ant or metallic-bright Gabriel's Trumpet out-fished all the logical imitative flies by an impressive margin. Lots of experienced fly fishers believe in attractors for trout. Consequently a heavy portion of the trout dry flies, nymphs, and streamers that have appeared over the past couple of decades have been attractors. But how many *emerger* patterns are attractors? To my knowledge, one.

I started playing with an attractor emerger several years ago when I noticed the category was empty. I went through a lot of ideas and variations, showed them repeatedly to the trout, and a couple of years ago settled on the dressing for my Thunder Dome. It's tied on a humped-shank hook to push its flashy shuck and abdomen down into the water, while its dubbed thorax and parachute hackle and buoyant horizontal wool wing hold everything afloat. The name Thunder Dome comes from the half-sphere--the "dome"--of

fuzzy, buoyant egg yarn or dyed wool atop it's hackle; that dome signals the location of the fly, especially on dark water. I tie the Thunder Dome in black and green and ginger-gold and pretty much whatever colors I feel the trout might like. My current favorite color though is purple. That's a hot color for attractor flies these days, and in my unnatural emerger fly it seems to move the fish at least as consistently as any. I like the fly on a size 14 hook and tie and fish it mostly in that size. But sizes 16, 12, and 10 have their times and places.



Two Thunder Domes: Give them a try when more natural looking patterns fail.

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Logically, this attractor fly is for open-minded rising trout or trout that will come up from a position just above the riverbed when something sufficiently interesting appears at the top--but not for hatches. And mostly, that's the philosophy I follow when deciding whether or not to try a Thunder Dome. Still...logic and trout? It's unwise to count on trout to act logically. So never hesitate to try a Thunder Dome during a hatch if you feel the urge to do so.

Emerging insects are just too easy and too frequent a target for river trout or a sane fly fisher to ignore. The best way to cash in on emerger flies is to purchase or tie a sound, versatile collection. Hope I helped you figure out such a collection for your rivers and your trout.



Photo by Carol Ann Morris

PATTERNS

Quigley Cripple Bob Quigley

HOOK: Light wire, standard length or 1X long, sizes 18 to 14.

THREAD: Olive or yellow 8/0 or 6/0.

TAIL (optional): Red hackle fibers.

THREAD: Olive or yellow 8/0 or 6/0.

TAIL (SHUCK): Brown Z-lon or marabou.

RIB: Small copper or red wire.

ABDOMEN: Pheasant-tail fibers.

THORAX: Pale-yellow buoyant dubbing.

WING and BURST WING CASE: natural-pale or dyed-light-blue-dun elk hair. The hair should be bound on top at in front of the thorax, the tips projecting straight off the hook's eye. Trim the butts at the rear of the thorax.

THUNDER DOME, PURPLE

HOOK: Light wire, humped shank, sizes 18 to 10.

THREAD: Purple 8/0 or 6/0.

TAIL-SHUCK: One strand of pearl Flashabou in a loop, or a short, thin clump of pearl Angel Hair or such.

RIB: Fine silver wire (I like Ultra Wire in "X-SM).

ABDOMEN: Purple Flashabou or Krystal Flash.

PARACHUTE WING: Yellow, chartreuse, orange, or pink wool or egg yarn.

HACKLE: Brown.

DOWN-WING: Tan, light-gray, or white or cream wool.

THORAX: Purple natural or synthetic buoyant dubbing (still tricky to find--I use a permanent marker on cream dubbing).

MARCH BROWN SPIDER Sylvester Nemes

HOOK: heavy wire, standard length, sizes 16 to 12.

THREAD: Orange 6/0 or 8/0. **RIB:** Oval gold tinsel.

BODY: Hare's mask, dubbed.

HACKLE: Natural-brown partridge flank, just two turns.

X CADDIS

Blue Ribbon Flies

HOOK: Light wire, 1X long, sizes 18 to 12

THREAD: Eight-ought or 6/0 in the body's color.

TAIL (SHUCK): Gold or amber antron yarn, short.

BODY: Antron, poly, or Super Fine Dry-Fly dubbing in green, tan, cream, black, or brown.

WING: Undyed deer hair. Trim the butts for a head.

[Video of Skip describing three of his favorite mayfly emerger patterns.](#)
[CLICK HERE](#)

DAVE HUGHES – FLYMPHS

(All photos by Dave Hughes except where noted)



Photo by Rick Hafele

The term *flymph* was coined by Pete Hidy, in the 1971 edition of *The Art of Tying the Wet Fly*, co-authored with James Leisenring. The original book came out in 1941 under that truncated title. The 1971 Crown edition had the added subtitle “...and Fishing the Flymph.” Hidy used the term in reference to imitations of insects in the transitional stage of emergence, just beneath the surface, “...not yet flies, but no longer nymphs, hence flymphs.” Today we might be more likely to use the term *emergers* for both the insects in that momentary stage, and the fly patterns tied to imitate them.

Flymph, however, is a useful term for a style of wet fly that imitates emergers of mayflies and caddis in that brief period when the shuck of the nymph or pupa is shed, and the dress of the dun or adult appears. This often takes place just beneath the surface, and is a very vulnerable time in the lives of any insects that emerge in just this way. They are able to swim feebly at best, and are compressed in the few inches of surface currents where trout are able to concentrate their feeding with great efficiency, to the distress of lots of those mayflies and caddis. Such vulnerabilities are probably among the reasons that many mayfly and caddis species adapted the survival strategy of mass emergence. Trout simply cannot eat them all, and enough escape to sow the seeds for the next generation of the species.

Not all mayflies, and even fewer caddis, emerge in a way that causes flymphs to be effective imitations for them. Some mayfly groups emerge by crawling out on shore. Their emergers are not available to trout. Just as some caddis families crawl out to emerge, and even more hatch at night, when trout might feed on them, but imitation of such activity is difficult at best, illegal at worst, as it is my home state of Oregon. The reason I point out this restriction of flymph effectiveness as they were originally defined by Pete Hidy--as imitations of certain emerging insects--is simply this: When you tie flymphs as imitations, it becomes very beneficial to study the naturals on which you’re going to base them.

This is reflected in Rick Hafele’s March Brown Flymph dressing. He tied the pattern first in the 1980s, after many years fishing the western March brown hatch in late winter and early spring. We all did well on standard dry flies during the heat of the hatch itself. But we all had trouble fooling the trout that continued to feed across broad flats, on failed emergers and duns, before the hatch and after it was over. When Rick came up with his concept for a flymph to imitate the crippled and drowned stages of the insect, our

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fishing was stretched out an hour or two both before and after the hatch, a very important addition to your fishing at that time of year when days are so short. When the emergence is shortened by weather so early in the season, the flymph can more than double the active fishing time during a day-long float of a river.



Rick Hafele fishing March Brown water in the Willamette Valley of Oregon, precisely the sort of water where you'd want to use a March Brown Flymph.



Rick Hafele's March Brown Flymph is simple to construct, and devastating during the hatch, even better before and after it. As with all flymphs, its construction is centered on a loose and fibrous body.



The western March brown is a size 12 insect, and is taken eagerly by trout in this dun stage, when lots of them are on the water. Before and after the hatch, trout feed on rising nymphs and drowned duns. During that time you can fish a March Brown Flymph and greatly increase the number of trout that you catch.

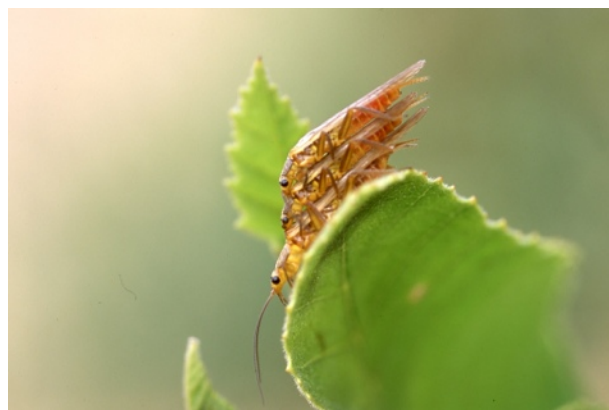
You could rely on a short list of insects that would be effective to imitate with flymphs. It would include blue-winged olive mayflies (*Baetis*), March browns (*Rhithrogena*), pale morning duns (*Ephemerella*), pale evening duns (*Heptagenia*), and a few reliable caddis such as spotted sedges (*Hydropsyche*), little sister sedges (*Cheumatopsyche*), and the ubiquitous grannoms (*Brachycentrus*). If you tied a few #16 BWO, #16 PMD, #14 PED, #14 and #16 Hare's Ear Flymphs, and #18 Muskrats, you'd have more than half of the specific hatches matched quite effectively.

Of course, you'd also be foolish to limit your use of flymphs to their original designation as imitations of insects *not yet*

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flies, but no longer nymphs. They're as useful when mayfly duns get drowned during a hatch, and are taken by trout subsurface afterward. They're very effective against trout feeding on the many caddis organizations that dive to the bottom to lay their eggs. I've even applied them in situations when trout fed on yellow sally stonefly adults that were busy depositing their eggs out over open water, and appeared to be emerging out there, though it's well known among entomologists that all stoneflies emerge by crawling out on streamside stones or protruding vegetation.

My own experience with flymphs has cut in both traditional and experimental directions. Many of my best memories of BWO hatches are wrapped around fishing a simple BWO Flymph, tied with blue dun hackle fiber tails, muskrat belly fur dubbed on yellow silk for the body, and light blue dun hen hackle...that's it. A peculiarity of the pattern is its ability to float when given a couple of sharp *whaps!* in the air on the backcast, to toss out entrained water. When cast upstream or across stream on a reach cast, a flymph if will float flush in the film until it's tugged under. Then it can be fished down and around on a very slow swing, as a wet fly, as its originators intended. But I catch more than half of my trout casting to rises, fishing it as a floating emerger, before ever plucking it under and fishing it as a wet.



During their mating season, yellow sallies often become confused about who is whom, and get into tangles along the stream banks that pitch them to the water. You can take advantage of that hermaphroditic confusion by fishing a pale-yellowish flymph right along the banks.



Jim Schollmeyer nibbling at the sort of Deschutes edges that are productive in late afternoon and early evening when pale evening duns emerge, and can be imitated with flymphs as well as floating flies.

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Pale evening dun mayflies emerge in very late afternoon, or at evening, when light begins to fail. The nymphs make a preliminary migration toward the edges of the river; emergence takes place within ten feet or so of the bank, often in somewhat placid flows. If the light remains sufficient to fish a dry fly during the hatch, I'll pick out individual rising trout and present dry flies to them along the shoreline. But that is not the normal case. More often, it's too dark to pinpoint rises, cast to them effectively, and follow the drift of a dry fly in the failing light.



The pale evening dun (right) is a bit larger and a shade more pale than the more famous pale morning dun. It's tempting to fish a PED or PMD dry fly during the hatch, and they will sometimes take trout, but a flymph on the swing can be both easier to fish and also more effective.



In such a case, it becomes a lot easier to tie on a #14 Pale Watery Dun flymph, and to fish it as a wet fly through the same soft currents. I can assure you trout will accept it, most often with more eagerness than they'll take the dry fly, because the habit of the naturals is to emerge as duns at the bottom, leaving the cast nymph shuck attached to stream-bottom stones. Trout are used to seeing those pale duns struggling toward the surface. A flymph on the swing is far more imitative during this hatch than a floating adult pattern.

When it comes to caddis I was baffled often, during my earliest fishing on the Deschutes River, by the bazzillions of spotted sedges that come out every evening, dash in circles around juniper and sagebrush tops, then crash into the water, swim down to the bottom to lay their eggs. This is common caddis behavior on such rivers as the Madison,

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Yakima, and Snake. It's become my habit to prepare for the evening fishing by rigging with a #14 Hare's Ear Flymph, then waiting for the trout to begin their nightly feeding spree. Sometimes you'll catch them on an Elk Hair Caddis dry. More often you'll be able to take at least a few by dangling a pupal pattern a foot or two under the floating fly. But most often it's most effective to soak a flymph on a very slow swing out among those cavorting trout.

The wet fly, as opposed to the pupa pattern, imitates adult females swimming down to lay their eggs, rather than the emerging pupa rising up for an escape at the surface. It's not to be held against the flymph pattern that it represents both stages of the caddis: the rising pupa and the diving adult. That can make it doubly effective.



The spotted sedge (left) is the most common mid-summer insect on the Deschutes River. Clouds of them circle sagebrush and juniper tree tops, then fly to the water toward evening, dash themselves to the water, swim down to lay their eggs on the bottom. A Hare's Ear Flymph (right) is the proper medicine when this happens.

I've had similar experiences fishing #14 muskrat-bodied flymphs during gray sedge hatches (*Rhyacophila*) or a #16 or #18 Starling and Herl during Mother's Day caddis hatches (*Brachycentrus*). In both of these cases, the first on somewhat swift water, the second on the flats of both tailwater and freestone streams, the flymph imitates both rising pupae and descending adults, giving you a bit more punch for your cast than you'd get out of a dry fly alone. In both cases it's difficult to follow the float of a dry fly, in the case of the Mother's Day caddis because so many naturals are often on the water that you can't sort out your imitation among them. It's easier, and usually more effective, to swing a flymph under the hatch than it is to fish a dry fly on top, or even a dry with a dropper.

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There is no rule that flymphs must be locked in to the prescriptions given for them in the 1941 and 1971 editions of *Tying the Wet Fly and Fishing the Flymph*. I'd recommend you learn Leisenring and Hidy's logic behind the flies, and their methods for tying them, but I'm not going to detain you here with their sophisticated tying techniques. They spun the bodies of their flymphs on silk, separate from the steps in tying the fly, and incorporated them in later. I've developed my own methods for skipping the separate steps, but I've also noticed that when I look at my own results critically, the flies have a far finer appearance when the bodies are spun separately rather than tied into the fly as I go.

All this is spooled out in detail in my book *Wet Flies*, and it would take book length to repeat here all that I said there, so I'm not. You can also find occasional copies of the 1971 edition of the original Leisenring and Hidy book on the collector's market, an endeavor I'm going have to embark upon myself, because I find that my own copy of the book, including original flies tied by Pete, has been missing for months.

I will make some notes on experimenting with flymphs, some of which I've done, much of which I wish to do, or will do when I've managed to throw off my own hobbles. I met and talked with Pete extensively when I first began tying flymphs, and he was quite adamant that any deviations from original concepts would be frowned on very sternly from above. But I'll confess that I've added a brass bead to the head of the extraordinary Tup's Nymph, a flymph from the 1941 version of the book, and it's done quite a bit of damage for me. But I'll blame it on Russell Husted, president of the Fort Worth Fly Fishers in Texas, who gave me a couple of the same nymph with beads incorporated into their bodies, and with which I did some devastation against trout, before I pinned them into my hat as models for further variations.

I think the most useful changes on the original flymph concept might be made with glass beads. The reason is simple: Pete Hidy demonstrated to Rick and me,



*The author's corruption of the famous Tups Indispensable Flymph, tied without the bead, of course, in Jim Leisenring and Pete Hidy's book *The Art of Tying the Wet Fly and Fishing the Flymph*.*

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the first time we met him at his home in Boise, Idaho, how a properly-tied flymph will entrain bubbles of air in its fibrous fur body when submerged in water. Pete tied a flymph, stuck a toothpick in its eye, stuck the fly into a glass of water. Indeed, it took bubbles of air under with it. Because the natural furs would soak up water when fished, it becomes necessary to use those flick-flick movements when casting, to toss off accumulated water. Even then, it can cease to entrain bubbles after a few drifts. Imagine, then, the benefits of tying a flymph with one or two mercury glass beads incorporated into the body.

I've not dared to do it yet, because I can feel Pete scowling at me, but I can tell you're about to. If you want a guide to such experiments, beyond what the originators of flymphs have prescribed, check out Allen McGee's book *Tying & Fishing Soft-Hackled Nymphs*. The great young Allen hasn't been shackled by tradition as have I; his book has dressings for many specific flies, but it also contains the diagnosis and prescriptions for further experimentations of your own. Allen's book is more about soft-hackles and nymphs than it is about flymphs, but you can often learn more by studying things surrounding your subject than you can by reading about the subject itself. ###

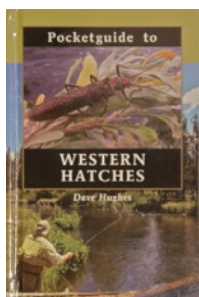


A broad and placid reach of water, of the type that is excellent to explore with flymphs on the swing whenever your dry flies seem to garner only neglect from the trout.

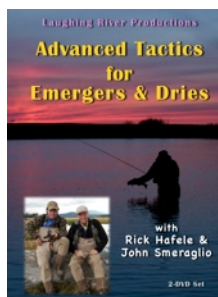
NOTE: Dave's book *Wet Flies* is a great primer for tying and fishing flymphs, soft-hackles, traditional wets, and fuzzy nymphs.

News from Dave, Rick, & Skip!

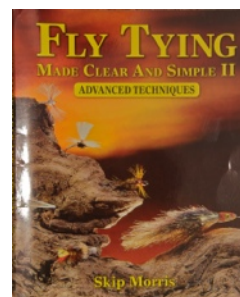
RECENT BOOK & DVD RELEASES



Dave's newest book, *Pocketguide to Western Hatches*, just out September 2011, is now available.--\$21.95--Stackpole Books, 2011



Rick's newest instructional DVD (2-disc set) with John Smeraglio titled, *Advanced Tactics for Emergers & Dries*, is now available. Order it online at www.laughingrivers.com or get at your local fly shop. \$29.95 - Laughing River Productions, 2011



Skip's latest book, *Fly Tying Made Clear and Simple II, Advanced Techniques*, offers thorough instructions for tying many great patterns for fussy trout. Frank Amato Pub, 2009

To learn more about Dave, Skip, and Rick's latest publications, where they are speaking, or to book them for your own program , go to their personal websites at:

Skip Morris: <http://www.skip-morris-fly-tying.com/>

Rick Hafele: <http://rickhafele.com>

Dave Hughes: <http://dave-hughes-fly-fishing.com/>